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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS SAN ANTONIO MAN IN FIREARMS SMUGGLING CASE

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that in San Antonio this afternoon, a federal jury returned a guilty verdict against 42-year-old Uriel Hernandez for conspiracy to engage in a firearms business without a license and for smuggling firearms into Mexico. As a result, the San Antonio man faces up to five years in federal prison when he is sentenced at 9:30am on July 10, 2009 by United States District Judge Xavier Rodriguez.

In the summer of 2006, agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives initiated an investigation after conducting an on-site inspection of a licensed federal firearms dealer in San Antonio. The investigation subsequently revealed a large number of guns purchased by a variety of individuals with, and on behalf of, Uriel Hernandez, his brother Benito Hernandez and others.

Evidence presented during the four-day trial indicated the Hernandez brothers purchased – individually and with the assistance of at least five straw purchasers – an assortment of handguns, shotguns, rifles, as well as several assault rifles from over 30 federal firearms dealers in the San Antonio area. Between April 2004 and November 2006, the brothers and the straw purchasers acquired and moved over 200 weapons from San Antonio through Laredo, Texas, into Mexico, where they were sold for a profit.

Prior to trial, San Antonio residents and straw purchasers Joannette Gonzales, Sandra Saenz, and Michael Gonzales entered pleas of guilty for making false statements in the course of firearms acquisitions. Benito Hernandez also entered a plea of guilty for making false statements during the course of firearms acquisitions. While convicting Uriel Hernandez, jurors this afternoon acquitted his brother Herminio Hernandez of the conspiracy charge.

This case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives with assistance from the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Department of Commerce and the Department of State. Assistant United States Attorney Bettina Richardson prosecuted this case on behalf of the Government.

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